

ACTION

January 10, 1970

6349

~~SECRET/EXDIS~~

MEMORANDUM FOR HENRY A. KISSINGER

FROM: John H. Holdridge

SUBJECT: Draft Cable on the "Chinese Road" in Laos

I attach a cable (Tab A) which State and Defense want to send to Vientiane concerning Ambassador Godloy's proposal to put a blocking force in the way of any further Chinese road construction toward the Mekong.

This is not really an action cable. The only action proposed is a reiteration of the suggestion that Souvanna get his position publicly on record against further Chinese road construction.

The cable is basically a continuation of an internal dialogue with Vientiane. As such, I see only one real problem with it: it focusses too much on the nuts and bolts, and does not require that Vientiane answer the more fundamental questions as to why they want to take this action. To mend this, I suggest the addition of a new paragraph between paragraphs 3 and 4, to the following effect:

"Before Washington decision can be reached on your proposal for military action, we will require your evaluation as to how the action would fit into your broad scenario. Specifically, we would require your opinion as to (a) importance you assign to this project in view of recent intelligence indications Chinese may intend to stop for present at Muong Houn, (b) importance of this action compared with need for all available efforts meet Communist offensives elsewhere, (c) relationship of this project to general desire to maintain present Laos stalemate at lowest possible level of warfare, and (d) implications of failure of Communists challenged effort to block road progress."

Recommendation: That you approve the cable at Tab A with the addition of the paragraph suggested above.

Approve _____

Disapprove _____

DOS, NSS, and
JCS reviews
completed.

LDX CHANNEL MESSAGE COVER FORM

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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Cable to ~~WIENTIANE~~, Bangkok, Saigon, Hong Kong & CINCPAC

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Validated by: WBrandt

eliver to:

White House - Dr. Kissinger

For: Clearance xxx

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Per Request



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SUBJ: Chinese Road Building in Laos

REFS: A. Vientiane 8820; B. Vientiane 41; C. Vientiane 78;
D. Vientiane 81

1. Your plan for an operation south of Muong Houn has been examined by the appropriate agencies in Washington. While it contains the attractive feature of a pre-emptive move calculated to deter the Chinese from moving south of Muong Houn with their road, we believe the plan as presented has important drawbacks. Any operation which is directed against Chinese involvement in Laos, of course, has most serious policy ramifications. We particularly do not think that it would be wise to mount an operation which would be significantly American in character. In addition,

FTED BY: J. M. P.	DRAFTING DATE: 1/8/70	TEL. EXT.: 21449	APPROVED BY: XXXXXXXXXX EA - Mr. Green
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REFERENCES:
/LC - Mr. Corcoran, ISA - Mr. Ware (draft) White House -
XXXXXX S/S -
- Amb. Brown (draft) CIA - [redacted] (draft) J - Amb. Johnson
XXXXXX Joint Staff - V/Adm. Johnson (no objection)

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unfavorable aspects include the following: US intervention might result in greater rather than less PRC and/or DRV involvement in western Laos; operation raises a question of ~~new~~ new "front" in Laos at a time when friendly resources are needed for upcoming NVA offensive elsewhere; American role would probably become well publicized; PRC attitude toward King and RLG would be adversely affected by American intervention at Lao request.

2. We are opposed to King's proposal (ref c) for USAF/RLAF strike against Muong Sai for similar reasons. We do not think that PRC policy of not admitting to road construction in Laos in any way indicates PRC would not actively counter friendly military strikes (formidable AAA installation in Muong Sai area suggest PRC readiness for action).
3. We suggest again that RLG set record straight on RLG December 1962 "request". This is one of the few measures which we believe might influence Peking's decision to continue construction and

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would at least provide basis for any subsequent actions which might be taken. Khamphan Panya appears to be somewhat confused about the diplomatic ~~history~~ history of Chinese road construction in Laos. Only "agreement" for road construction was that signed by Souvanna's government in Khang Khay (Sisoumang Sisaleuamsak) and PRC economic and cultural mission on January 13, 1962, ~~providing~~ providing for Phong Saly road. PRC merely agreed to consider the Phoumi December 1962 request for extension of this road. Approach we have suggested is designed to invalidate Phoumi request under any interpretation which ~~XXXX~~ PRC might choose to put on it. Souvanna could note in a press interview, subsequently run in Lao Press, that only valid agreement for road construction was that of January 1962 and this road has been completed. We would suggest that he not refer to construction workers as military (implying PRC violation of Geneva Agreements) nor indicate RLG might ~~kfx~~ formally protest to PRC or seize Co-Chairmen with PRC

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violation.

4. While we have not yet concluded that military action would serve a useful purpose, we would be prepared to consider repeat consider some plan for a basically Lao deterrent operation. RLA

[redacted] should be basic combat force. We would prefer no repeat no air support for this operation since it would be regarded by enemy virtually as U.S., but if air support is essential, RLAF (including perhaps B Team) should be used instead of US Tacair. (US air could, however, probably replace T-28 sorties diverted from other targets.) Plan would not, we assume, provide for incremental increase in US or Lao involvement, but for exfiltration, if PRC/DRV demonstrate their intention to hold area by sending in substantial reinforcements. We realize RLA's lack of ready reserves, [redacted]

and vulnerability of T-28 to AAA are reasons for your recommendation that US Tacair [redacted] play key roles in

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operation. However, we would like you to look again at what the Lao could do with minimum US involvement.

5. We appreciate your informing us expeditiously of ~~XXXX~~ RLAF T-28 & bombing of road area. We do expect measures which you and Lao are taking (ref D) will insure that there is no repetition of this incident.

6. Please caption telegrams "Chinese Road Building in Laos". We regularly repeat messages on this subject to Bangkok, Saigon, Hong Kong and CINCPAC, and other addressees when appropriate.

END

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